

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 70
By Herron

A RESOLUTION to create a special joint committee to study the declining duck population in Tennessee and to recommend ways and means to rectify such problem.

WHEREAS, the average seasonal duck bag per active duck hunter in Tennessee has declined during the last three seasons – from 16.2 in 2000 to a low of 9.7 in 2003; and

WHEREAS, according to the Mid-Winter Waterfowl Survey, which is taken on a specific date each January in Tennessee, the average number of ducks present in the state on such state for 1996-2000 was 510,133; the average number for 2001-2004 declined to 387,374, and by January 2004, the count had declined even further to 256,290 ducks ; and

WHEREAS, all interested parties agree that the duck population in Tennessee has declined significantly during the past five to seven years; however, there are many different opinions about the cause or causes of this precipitous decline; and

WHEREAS, many of the theories about the causes of the declining duck population in Tennessee are beyond the reach of human intervention, including the factor of milder winters with less snow cover in northern climates resulting in fewer ducks coming as far south as Tennessee during the winter, but many others are directly attributable to human activity; and

WHEREAS, waterfowl experts tend to attribute Tennessee's declining duck population to the loss of breeding ground habitat and to hunting pressure brought about by the steadily increasing number of duck hunters in the state since 1990 and the imposition of a liberal duck hunting season (60 days) since 1998; and

WHEREAS, on the other hand, many hunters also see the problem as being man-made, but instead attribute Tennessee's declining duck population to TWRA's system of state waterfowl refuges; and

WHEREAS, in 1986, TWRA began building such refuges to provide water, food and protection for ducks along the state's river systems; there are now ten state waterfowl refuges in West Tennessee; and

WHEREAS, these state waterfowl refuges have helped to disseminate the duck population throughout the region and have proven to be an effective tool for disease control; and

WHEREAS, the creation of TWRA's state waterfowl refuges unquestionably made ducks more accessible initially and thus aided the success of duck hunters, but many hunters believe that the ducks have now adapted to this habitat and will no longer leave the refuges to feed during daylight hours; therefore, they believe there are now actually fewer ducks available to hunt; and

WHEREAS, whatever its cause or causes, Tennessee's declining duck population represents a real waterfowl management problem for sportsmen, naturalists, and indeed, the entire citizenry of this great state, and measures to rectify such problem should be taken in the most expeditious manner possible; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that there is hereby created a special joint committee to study the declining duck population in Tennessee and to recommend ways and means to rectify such problem.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that in conducting such study, the special joint committee shall examine the following concepts and evaluate their likely efficacy in reversing the trend in Tennessee's declining duck population:

(1) the imposition of a moderate (40 days) or even shorter hunting season for several years, within the parameters of federal regulations;

(2) the imposition of a split hunting season that allows hunting on Saturdays and Sundays with a five-day moratorium during the week within the parameters of the regular hunting season to relieve the pressure on the duck population;

(3) the implementation of hunting on a limited basis on TWRA's state waterfowl refuges;

(4) the restoration of breeding ground habitat for the duck population through waterfowl management programs and projects; and

(5) any other concept or proposal the committee deems potentially constructive.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the special joint committee shall consist of three (3) members of the House of Representatives and three (3) members of the Senate, to be appointed by the respective Speakers.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Tennessee Wildlife Resources Agency and all other appropriate state agencies shall provide assistance to the special joint committee upon request of the Chair.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that all legislative members of the special joint committee who are duly elected members of the General Assembly shall remain members of such committee until the committee reports its findings and recommendations to the General Assembly.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the special joint committee shall be convened by the member with the most years of continuous service in the General Assembly, and at its first meeting shall elect a Chair, Vice-Chair, and such other officers the committee deems necessary.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the special committee shall timely report its findings and recommendations, including any proposed legislation, to the One Hundred Fourth General Assembly no later than February 1, 2006, at which time the committee shall cease to exist.